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CURSORY REMARKS

ON AN

ENQUIRY

INTO THE

EXPEDIENCY AND PROPRIETY

OF

PUBLIC OR SOCIAL WORSHIP:

INSCRIBED TO

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BY EUSEBIA.

(Miss Mary Hay)

THE SECOND EDITION, WITH A POSTSCRIPT.

How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts!
A day in thy courts is better than a thousand.

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CURSORY REMARKS, &c.

SHOULD Mr. WAKEFIELD take the trouble of perusing the following pages, he will probably charge the writer with great presumption; a woman, young, unlearned, unacquainted with any language but her own; possessing no other merit than a love of truth and virtue, an ardent desire of knowledge, and a heart susceptible to the affecting and elevated emotions afforded by a pure and rational devotion; endeavouring to divest herself of every improper bias; to search the scriptures, and carefully compare with them the various ideas of the different sects and denominations of Christians, with a full determination of preserving her mind free and open to conviction, and pursuing and embracing truth without partiality and without prejudice, wherever it may be found. Under great disadvantages, disadvantages, if I may be allowed so to speak, that would have been almost insuperable to a mind less

less active, and less in earnest in the research; I have already, I hope, made some little progress in this most important of all pursuits, and by rectifying, in a measure, my judgment, opened a source of exquisite intellectual entertainment and moral improvement.

In this disposition, and with these ideas, I have attentively perused the "Enquiry into the expediency and propriety of Public or Social Worship." Surprised, I confess, at the novelty of the address, yet resolved to suspend my opinion, and seriously consider the arguments adduced in support of an hypothesis, which appeared to me so singular and extraordinary.

The esteem which I had before conceived for the integrity and piety of the author's character, was greatly heightened by the perusal of many parts of this tract, as was my reverence for his understanding and genius. Did every human being possess a mind equally refined, elevated, and philosophic, his heart might indeed become a temple for the Deity, and his enlightened and fervent devotion stand in no need of external means to aid its aspirations, or confirm its sense of duty. But alas!
a very

a very little knowledge of the world must convince us that this is far from being the case, and that the bulk of mankind, engrossed by the inferior concerns of attaining worldly riches, honours, and pleasures, are still in the infancy of knowledge, and incapable of entering into the spirit of a religion entirely spiritual and intellectual. On such (waving for a moment the consideration, whether Mr. Wakefield's notions are founded on truth and scripture) very unfavourable impressions may be made by the disapprobation which he expresses of all family and public worship; the ludicrous manner in which he at times treats the subject, and the general censure in which he involves those who approve and practise it, as "fanatic, ostentatious, vociferous, and frantic babblers, pharisaical, enthusiastic," &c.

This description will undoubtedly apply to the many abuses, which in every age have disgraced both reason and christianity in private, as well as in public devotion; for, innumerable and gross have been the absurd methods by which men have thought to recommend themselves to the Deity; nor is there any institution so perfect as not to be liable to corruption. But surely there has been, and still is, a respectable
number

number of christian ministers, who with humility, perspicuity, and soberness, lead the devotions of a serious and grateful audience, whose benevolent hearts expand with every humane affection in the prospect of a number of their fellow-creatures, without any motive of constraint or interest, voluntarily assembled to offer a rational and united homage to their common parent, encouraged by the promise of the Saviour of mankind, who expressly says in Matthew the eighteenth and nineteenth verse, *Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth, as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.*

The sense of which is so obvious, when taken in connexion with the following verse, as to require all Mr. Wakefield's ingenuity to explain away. And in the seventeenth chapter of the gospel of St. John, our Lord has himself given us an example of Social Prayer; for though his disciples are not mentioned as audibly joining in the solemn address of their Master to his Father, and their Father, his God, and their God; they evidently appear to be present, and no doubt attended to a petition so

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fervent

fervent and tender on their behalf, with the most lively emotions of gratitude and affection.

There also seems in the conduct of the apostles (who being the immediate followers of the Messiah, I should imagine we might safely take as our guides, notwithstanding we are informed that theology is so much better understood in this day) repeated instances of joining in religious homage to almighty God, as in Acts i. 14. *These all continued with one mind in prayer, with some women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brethren.*

Verse 24. *And they prayed, saying, &c.*

Chap. iv. verse 24. *Upon bearing this, the company lifted up their voice with one mind unto God, and said, &c.*

Chap. vi. verse 6. *These they presented before the apostles, who prayed, and put their hands upon them.*

Chap. xii. verse 5. *Peter therefore was kept in prison; but earnest prayer was made by the church (which implies a collected body) unto God for him.*

And verse 12. *He went to the house of Mary, mother of John, surnamed Mark, where a good many were gathered together and praying.*

Not,

Not, I presume, gathered together for the purpose of offering individual prayer.

Chap. xiii. verse 3. *So the church after fasting and praying.*

Chap. xiv. verse 23. *And after appointing elders in the church for them, and praying, &c.*

Chap. xvi. ver. 13. *And on the sabbath-day we went out at the city-gate by a river's side, where prayer was usually made.*

Verse 16. *Now as we were going to prayer, &c.*

Chap. xx. verse 36. *And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down and prayed with them all.*

Chap. xxi. verse 5. *And we kneeled down on the shore and prayed.*

James v. verse 14. *Is any one sick among you, let him call for the elders of the church unto him to pray over him, &c.*

1 Cor. xiv. 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17, where St. Paul speaks of praying with his understanding and not with tongues, that the church may be edified, and the unlearned hearer say Amen.

These examples, the words of which I have generally quoted from Mr. Wakefield's translation, I own appear to me to be in point, and a sufficient authority for the conduct of the followers of Christ in all ages.

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The reproof of our Lord to the vain repetitions, and long prayers of the hypocritical Pharisees, when taken in its connexion, seems merely intended to express a detestation of their duplicity and ostentatious private prayers, made standing in the streets and the market-places, with no other view than to be seen of men, and as a cloak to their abominable extortions and crimes.

The objection to prayer, as implying a doubt whether the Supreme Being was acquainted with the proper means of our real happiness, or knew not our wants before we uttered them, would equally apply to retired as to public devotion, and reminds me of the elegant language of a modern Deist*: “ I never forget myself so far
 “ as to pray ; for not to be content with our situations in the order of things, is to desire to
 “ be no longer a human being ; it is to wish
 “ things were otherwise ordered than they are,
 “ to wish for evil and disorder. No ! thou
 “ source of justice and truth, God merciful
 “ and just ! placing my confidence in thee, the
 “ chief desire of my heart is, that thy will be
 “ done ; by rendering my will conformable to
 “ thine, I act as thou dost, I acquiesce in thy
 “ goodness, and conceive myself already a par-

* Rousseau.

" taker of that supreme felicity which is its
" reward."

However just and beautiful this sublime apostrophe may appear, as the voice of natural religion, yet revelation by unfolding to us more of the moral government of the Deity, enjoins various positive duties, and appoints them as a means of our improvement and happiness. *Ask, and ye shall receive; knock and it shall be opened. Men ought always to pray and faint not.*

And though such devout aspirations can give no information to an Omniscent Being, nor alter his plans, originally designed for the greatest general and individual good; yet it is possible, that they may be links in the great chain of causes and effects, and by giving rise to pure and pious sentiments, be ultimately productive of consequences the most beneficial. Far as the world has advanced to maturity, and enlightened as is the present age, compared with former obscurity; yet are the generality of mankind by no means sufficiently spiritualized, as to be capable of rising into first principles, and regulating their practice from the reason and moral fitness of things; and where through inattention or incapacity, this is not

to be expected, even a mechanical devotion, a mere performance of external duties (and private prayer may frequently be no more) may have a restraining effect upon the conduct; as it is a general observation, that youth, who have received a religious education, though the precepts may not have reached the heart, are yet incapable of rushing into vice and dissipation, with the same callous inconsideration as others, whose early associations have been of a different nature: when through the medium of the senses, repeated impressions have been made on the brain, good or evil habits acquire an ascendancy not easily to be eradicated; words must first be taught, and ideas will afterwards cling to them. If, to avoid the appearance of a vain display, all outward acts and expressions of devotion are to be discouraged, piety will want the prevailing recommendation of example, or religion be reduced to a mere system of morals, which unassisted reason might have discovered without needing a divine interference.

The idea is equally just and beautiful, that
 “ Christianity, as being adapted to the more
 “ mature age of the world, addresses itself to
 “ the improved reason of man, unincumbered
 “ with those innumerable ceremonies and sym-
 bols,

“ bolts, which were necessary in the dawn or
 “ infancy of the human mind ;” yet still are
 our faculties limited, and we must pass by out-
 ward and sensible impressions, from which
 results every varied combination of thought,
 through gross and refined self-interest, to a
 truly rational pursuit of our real and ultimate
 good. Had not the founder of our holy religion,
 however pure and spiritual the doctrines he
 taught, thought some exterior observances cal-
 culated to advance the truths he inculcated, he
 certainly would not have enjoined them on his
 followers, as in the Lord’s Supper, which was
 to commemorate or shew forth his death till
 his second coming ; nor have submitted to the
 baptism of John, which to him could not have
 been a baptism of repentance ; for he knew no
 sin : neither could it be styled with more pro-
 priety a proselyte washing ; but for some wise
 purpose, no doubt, when opposed by John, he
 replied, *Suffer me now, for so it becometh us to*
perform every righteous ordinance, Mat. iii. 15.

That a mystical sense, entirely contrary to the
 simplicity of the gospel, and an undue stress
 has been laid on these rites, must readily be al-
 lowed ; for there is a wide distinction between
 the use and abuse of means : for when set in
 competition

competition with benevolence of heart and purity of conduct, all rites and ceremonies are undoubtedly lighter than vanity; yet we should remember our Lord's reproof to the Pharisees for neglecting the weightier matters of the law: *These ought ye to have done, and not to have left the others undone.*

Mr. Wakefield justly observes on the wisdom of Providence, "in the reformation, which
" proceeded moderately, as had it attempted to
" reform all at once, it had been the ready
" way to have reformed nothing." The world is not yet ripe for a religion purely mental and contemplative; and the majority, by giving up all exterior means of generating devotional affections, would soon cease to give themselves any concern on the subject, and breaking loose from what at present affords a wholesome restraint, become mere profligates or worldlings.

In many houses, if a quarter of an hour in the day was not appropriated to the reading of the scriptures, and uniting in thanks to God for his preservation during the past day—

" For home the resort of love, and joy,

" Where polish'd friends and dear relations meet

" And mingle into bliss"—

and

and imploring the protection of his Providence through the darkness of the night, and the defenceless hours of repose ; the servants, and younger branches of the family, from gross ignorance, and the levity of youth, might live in an habitual neglect of this important part of piety towards their Creator ; the propriety of which they saw not enforced by example, more persuasive to the young and flexible, than a thousand precepts. Nor is it easy to conceive of any thing so ridiculous to a beneficent mind, in the contemplation of an innocent, and amiable family ; with hearts overflowing with tenderness for each other, and adoration for the author of the social blessings they enjoy, uniting in devout aspirations to the source of all felicity, whose essence is love ; and whom we resemble in proportion as we imbibe this affecting sentiment, the source and end of all virtue, and all happiness.

I confess I cannot but apprehend very pernicious consequences from this contempt of sabbatical observances, and material impressions, still necessary (if not equally so) for the greater part of the votaries of religion, even at this advanced period. Mr. Wakefield seems not aware that a judgment formed of mankind at large

large from himself, and a circle of friends united by a congeniality of virtues, and talents,

“ Whose minds are richly fraught
“ With philosophic stores, superior light,”

must necessarily be erroneous. Many, I fear, without entering into the spirit of the author, will avail themselves of an authority so respectable, to brand with hypocrisy and fanaticism, their more pious neighbours, and be in haste to shake off a yoke, which their vices and frivolity only, has rendered intolerable; to devote the day of leisure from business; not to “ studying the revealed will of God, and expounding the divine law to the poor;” but to the indulgence of sensuality, or at best a criminal indolence.

I have myself experienced so much satisfaction, intellectual entertainment, and improvement, from an attendance on the public ordinances of religion, that I cannot without concern, see an institution which I am persuaded has been productive of consequences the most salutary, treated with acrimony and derision; nor do I conceive that by such methods (even were it desirable) proselytes are likely to be gained. From a neglect of the sabbath, numbers

bers of youth have dated the commencement of a career of guilt and folly ; and in an observance of it, the wounded heart has frequently received consolation ; the careless been arrested by conviction ; the erroneous rectified, and the ignorant instructed. Where real benefits may be derived (admitting for a moment that some little cloud of superstition may mingle with the good) shall we, to use the allusion of a celebrated writer, rend the garment, in stripping off every superfluous ornament ? With these limited faculties, in this infancy of being, this first stage of existence, perfection is not to be expected, and even *our* best sacrifices must be impure in the sight of that Being *who searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins of the children of men.* *Let no man therefore put a stumbling block, or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.* Rom. xiv. 13.

The pastoral or ministerial office, according to Mr. Wakefield's notion, seems entirely unnecessary, though authorised by the examples of our Saviour, his more immediate disciples, and the primitive church ; by scripture and by reason. I would not be understood to mean as by law established, for all religious establishments are irrational, and anti-christian ; but in the simplicity of the apostolic spirit. Indeed the

the idea of one man's taking the charge of another man's soul, or spiritual concerns, is, and ought to be, justly exploded as ridiculous and absurd; yet never could I read the admirable delineation of the duties of a truly christian minister, put by a fascinating, though sceptical writer, into the mouth of a priest of the romish persuasion, without feeling the most lively, and affecting sentiments of veneration.

“ There is no character in the world which
 “ appears to me so desirable as that of a pastor;
 “ a good pastor is a minister of goodness, as a
 “ good magistrate is a minister of justice. A
 “ pastor, though he may not always have it in his
 “ power to do good himself, is always in his
 “ duty when soliciting it of others, and very
 “ often obtains it when he knows how to make
 “ himself truly respectable. Oh! that I en-
 “ joyed but some little benefice among the poor
 “ people in our mountains, how happy should
 “ I then be! for I cannot but think I should
 “ make my parishioners happy; I should never
 “ indeed make them rich, but I should partake
 “ of their poverty; I would raise them above
 “ meanness and contempt, more insupportable
 “ than indigence itself; I would induce them
 “ to love concord, and to cherish that equality
 C “ which

“ which often banishes poverty, and always
 “ renders it more supportable. When they
 “ should see that I was no richer than them-
 “ selves, and yet lived content, they would
 “ learn to console themselves under their lot,
 “ and to live contented too. In the instructions
 “ I should give them, I should be less directed
 “ by the sense of the church, than that of the
 “ gospel, whose tenets are more simple, and
 “ whose morals are more sublime, that teaches
 “ but few religious forms, and many deeds of
 “ charity. Before I should teach them their duty,
 “ I should always endeavour to practise it myself,
 “ in order to let them see that I really thought as
 “ I spoke. Had I any Protestants in my neigh-
 “ bourhood, or in my parish, I would make no
 “ distinction between them and my own flock ;
 “ in every thing that regarded acts of christian
 “ charity, I would endeavour to make them all
 “ equally love each other, regard each other as
 “ brethren, respecting all religions, and in
 “ peace enjoying their own. ROUSSEAU.”

So respectable, even in the eyes of infidels,
 appear the humble, consistent, pious characters
 (for such undoubtedly there are) of those whom
 Mr. Wakefield seems inclined to consign over,
 with

with more satiric wit than truth, to fanaticism and folly.

This is an age of controversy, and all who love truth must rejoice in seeing the spirit of freedom and enquiry universally diffeminated; as in such an impartial discussion, where every question is agitated, and every opinion, however respectable from usage, or antiquity, brought to the test; we may reasonably hope that the pure gold of unadulterated religion, will at length be separated from the dross which has so long obscured its lustre: and even though this desirable end should be frustrated from the proneness of the human mind to extremes; yet are there not any subjects on which the understanding can be exercised with so much advantage as on those of moral and religious truth. Better entertain any opinions, however wild, mystical, or erroneous (so as they are confined within the bounds of mere mental error) than give ourselves no concern on these important subjects; or by taking for granted the reveries of others, suffer the most tyrannical of all impositions; an imposition over conscience, which has been the curse of the world, and the most effectual barrier to improvement of every kind. Yet in this mixed and imperfect state there is

scarce any good without its attendant evil; Christianity, by becoming a science, too frequently appears sour, haughty, and contentious; and in general the disputes which have disturbed the peace of mankind, have not been about justice, mercy, and love; but concerning curious, and perplexing points of speculation, where much may be said on both sides, and which, therefore, are not likely ever to be finally adjusted; questions inoffensive perhaps in themselves, as containing no very material practical consequences; so as "*charity with all her gentle train is there, who openeth her mouth with wisdom, and in whose tongue is the law of kindness.*" But, alas! how seldom is this the case! evil tempers have mixed themselves with the love of truth; and the mildest and most benevolent religion in the world, has been a scourge to the nations. However these differences may, and will terminate in accomplishing the final purposes of the great governor of the universe; yet we who can only perceive a part of the plan, while we bewilder ourselves in searching after final causes, and the origin of evil, must lament the disorders which it occasions. In a future system, where our faculties will expand, neither bounded by time, nor darkened by frailty; we shall, I trust, penetrate to the source of things, and become true philosophers,

philosophers, without any danger of mistake or hazard.

I feel as if I had ventured beyond my depth ; I am unequal to the management of controversial weapons, and have perhaps, though influenced by the purest motives, displayed in the preceding remarks my weakness only, and incapacity for the discussion.

F I N I S.

[41]

philosophy, without any danger of mistake
or error.

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I am unequal to the management of controversy
and weapons, and have perhaps, though influ-
enced by the spirit of the age, displayed in the
present some of the faults of the age, and in-
capacity for the discussion.

F I N I S

POSTSCRIPT.

- “Tis not a flash of fancy, which sometimes
“Dazzling our minds, sets off the slightest rhimes;
“Bright as a blaze, but in a moment done;
“True wit is everlasting like the sun.
“Defects of witty men deserve a cure,
“And those who are so will ev’n this endure.”
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EUSEBIA ought perhaps to be (and is) highly gratified by the honourable mention Mr. Wakefield makes of her address to him, in page 60 of his new edition of “An enquiry into the expediency and propriety of Public and Social Worship.” Yet, as he thought her not unworthy of serious notice, she could not help feeling a wish that he had not prefaced it by a ludicrous sally unworthy of the subject, and of the writer, and which was justly compared by a friend on reading it—to the artifice of a council who draws off the attention of the court from the question in debate, to excite by an excursion of fancy quite foreign

from the subject a laugh at the expence of the witness—that

“ Dread laugh which scarce the firm Philosopher can scorn,”

and which inflicts on a mind of delicate sensibility, a more painful and complicated emotion than was, perhaps, wished or intended. Abashed and wounded, I withdraw from a polemic controversy to which I profess myself very unequal: convinced that truth and simplicity are by no means a match for wit and talents, talents which though they may fail in enforcing conviction, yet dazzle and perplex, “ and make the worse “ appear the better reason.” Satisfied with the glory of having, incited by the purest motives, made an attempt which in itself is virtue, however the abilities which executed, may have failed in seconding the intentions which gave rise to it.

And here let me adopt Dr. Disney’s apology, infinitely more applicable to me, for venturing to address a gentleman of Mr. Wakefield’s literary character; an address which I might have spared, had I previously had the pleasure of seeing the excellent little tract from which I quote. “ Where the question does not de-
“ pend upon very deep criticism, or very abstruse
“ reasoning, or upon dark and doubtful expressions, a
“ common understanding, accompanied with disposi-
“ tions equally serious, with a love of virtue equally
“ ardent, and with a faith equally sincere, need not
“ be silenced by an acknowledged superiority in critical
“ literature.”

One or two more observations I cannot forbear making. Mr. Wakefield complains that he has been represented by many who profess to have read his pamphlet, as an enemy to all public observance of the Sabbath, the direct contrary to which (he adds) is so plain on the face of his performance, as could not but have been perceived, except by "inattentive listless, "ness, undistinguishing stupidity, or wilful malignity." Whether from inattention or stupidity (certainly not from malignity) I cannot say, but I confess I was inclined to this opinion by his contempt of "Sabbatical "Christians," "beggarly elements," and "wretched "remains of barbarity and Judaism," &c. With pleasure I find the new edition less equivocal, and candidly acknowledge the plan of Social Worship there sketched out (which we are informed may be allowed some time longer in compassion to the weaknesses of Christians, till I presume, the rising generation being "all taught of God," stand in need of no other instruction) is granting almost all that can be asked, or is practised by the generality of rational Dissenters. Yet here permit me to say that I cannot discern any thing either so unscriptural, or irrational, in supplications for temporal blessings, so as they are offered in a lowly and submissive temper, and with proper resignation to Divine Wisdom. "Father, if it be possible, let "this cup pass from me (said our Lord); nevertheless "not my will, but thine be done." Our "daily "bread" is also a temporal good, for which we are encouraged to ask, though fasting might sometimes have a better effect on our moral character; or why

PRAY

pray not to be led "into temptation," when it might prove the trial, and perfecting of our virtue.

A mere philosophic fatalist may object to such petitions, as conceiving individual good must yield to general laws (miserable consolation this to the children of sorrow) but a Christian, though he should be a Necessarian, may reasonably hope that his fervent though humble aspirations to the best of Beings, his Father and his God, may be appointed as a means of his virtuous prosperity.

But supposing these ideas tinged with fanaticism, an Enthusiast on whom the "club of argument" makes no impression, will rarely be corrected by the "shafts of ridicule," though seasoned by attic salt, and pointed by a keen satiric wit scarcely compatible with the unresisting meekness of the Christian character, who being reviled, revileth not again, who blesteth those that curse, and prayeth for those who despitefully entreat. For though I have sufficient "magnanimity to respect the frankness," and admire the "intrepidity" of spirit which distinguishes Mr. Wakefield's writings, yet I cannot help thinking the "hindrance he has suffered in his secular concerns, on the account of his religious opinions" (a persecution indeed in the highest degree unjust and irrational) has in some measure embittered his mind, and added poignancy to his remarks; but it may be that the timidity and gentleness generally attributed to my sex, may render me an incompetent judge of a conduct, which nature and education combine in influencing me to consider

consider as unlovely, and unlikely to produce a beneficial effect. Beautiful and pointed is a contrary method of recommending unpleasing truths, as described by one of our English poets.

“ With eloquence innate his soul was arm’d,
 “ Though harsh the precept, yet the teacher charm’d;
 “ He bore his high commission in his look,
 “ And sweetly temper’d awe, and soften’d all he spoke.”

And indeed a very little acquaintance with human nature, must convince us that our feelings are sympathetic, benevolent affections are reflected back from all hearts to the mind that cherishes them, while asperity irritates only where it means to reform. The soft showers, and fructifying dews of Heaven nourish the grateful soil, which quickly vivifies into vegetation, blossoms, and fruit, while the torrents and hurricanes of tropical climates, though fertilizing in the end, first desolate the earth, and agitate the mind with terror and disgust.

Once again allow me to add, for loquacity is a feminine foible, that a dangerous precedent, I apprehend, might be established by the idea that the conduct of the apostles, and even of our Saviour himself, in some cases affords no criterion for our imitation, as we may be permitted to conjecture that any positive injunction, or religious observance, which meets not with our approbation, was a mere local indulgence to the weakness, the manners, or the prejudices of the times when the Gospel was first promulgated. Some
 may

may improve on this notion and carry it to moral precepts, which they are not inclined to practise, and which therefore they may choose to consider as suited only to peculiar circumstances, situations, and climates.

Where then are we to fix the standard? If we may thus be wise above what is written, inspiration is reduced to a very low ebb, we must no longer refer to the law and to the testimony, but confounded and bewildered wander in an endless labyrinth of vague and distressing perplexity; and while erecting a barrier against superstition (which is not the crying sin of this reasoning philosophic age) throw wide open an entrance to scepticism and infidelity.

Before I conclude, I must express the peculiar pleasure and cheerfulness with which I entirely accord with Mr. Wakefield's beautiful and philanthropic language (and rejoice in the conviction of its truth). "That however disjoined in opinion, the benevolent and liberal united in heart, amidst all the varieties of sentiment and profession, may be compared to travellers on their way to the same city; separated for a time by roads which divaricate indeed, but are never very distant from each other, and meet with a quick convergency in the same point at last."

FINIS.

